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UNDP: COUNTRY COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS AND RELATED MATTERS

Assistance to Montserrat

Note by the Administrator

1. The first country cooperation framework (CCF) for Montserrat (1997-1999) was finalized and approved by the Government in July 1997. However, owing to the rapidly changing circumstances in the country brought about by the full-fledged eruption of the Soufriere Hills Volcano on 25 June 1997, the CCF was withdrawn from consideration by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board at its third regular session 1997, and a request was made for postponement of its approval. In the interim, the Executive Board endorsed the provision of emergency assistance, to be accommodated under target for resources assignment from the core TRAC line 1.1.3.

2. UNDP has had a history of successful cooperation with the Government of Montserrat. By the end of the third country programme (1992-1996) UNDP in conjunction with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) had assisted the Government in setting up a Physical Planning Unit, and had provided training for technical and professional staff. In the same period, UNDP and UNCHS also assisted with the preparation of the Montserrat Environment Profile, the development of the National Environmental Action Plan, the National Physical Development Plan and the Development Strategy for North Montserrat, successively. Environmental awareness and education, together with the revamping of planning legislation, were other features of the third country programme, the principal focus areas of which were environmental management and planning.

3. The first major volcanic eruption in June 1997 followed several earlier eruptions in 1995 and 1996 and resulted in pyroclastic flow sweeping over an area of approximately 4 square kilometres on the Soufriere Hills Volcano's eastern and northern flanks. Nineteen people were killed and 10 villages

destroyed, with infrastructural damages estimated at $1.5 million. This tragic event was only the forerunner to a series of catastrophic explosions which continued into 1998 and which have destroyed or made inaccessible most of the formerly developed and densely populated southern part of the island. Two thirds of the islands' 1995 population of approximately 11,000 have evacuated to the neighbouring States and other countries, particularly the United Kingdom. The relatively underdeveloped northern part of the island is considered safe, and all remaining residents have been relocated to this safe zone, where relief and resettlement operations have been concentrated since the onset of the disaster.

4. The process of evacuation from the southern part of the island commenced with the first volcanic eruptions in 1995. Homes and businesses were destroyed and an array of new needs emerged, particularly in relation to the shortage of housing and infrastructure facilities in the north. UNDP responded with the use of special programme resources to fund a new housing project in the north, in collaboration with the Caribbean Community, in order to aid the Government's resettlement efforts.

5. Since the endorsement of emergency assistance by the Executive Board, UNDP has allocated TRAC 1.1.3 resources for use in a catalytic manner in the Government's resettlement efforts. However, the process of matching TRAC 1.1.3 guidelines and requirements with the needs of the Government has been unexpectedly difficult. With this in mind, UNDP also embarked on efforts to mobilize additional collaborative support from other donors, namely, the United Nations Volunteer programme and the Government of the United Kingdom. A number of key technical assistance needs have been identified and agreement on collaboration has been reached by all parties. The programme emphasizes mainly the provision of technical assistance support in backstopping the Government's immediate and longer-term reconstruction and sustainable development efforts.

6. The efforts by the Government have most recently resulted in the preparation of a draft Sustainable Development Plan (SDP). The process of finalizing the SDP has begun and once completed, its implementation will focus on a number of key priority sectors that are central to the long-term development goals of the country. The Government therefore envisages that the implementation of the SDP will provide the future basis for cooperation with UNDP. Under these circumstances, the Government of Montserrat has indicated its preference for a programming arrangement with UNDP based on a case-by-case approval of projects for the foreseeable future.

7. The Administrator has reviewed this matter and therefore seeks the authorization of the Executive Board to continue to appraise and approve programmes on a case-by-case basis, consistent with the rules, regulations and normal criteria of UNDP, until such time as it is deemed appropriate to return to a normal programming basis.